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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 002442

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STATE FOR INL/LP, WHA/AND

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TAGS: SNAR PGOV EC

SUBJECT: ADDRESSING INCREASED COUNTER-NARCOTICS FLOW
THROUGH ECUADOR

REF: QUITO 2384

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR LINDA JEWELL REASONS: 1.4 (b)
and (d)

¶1. (U) Summary: A recent ONDCP-sponsored conference in Quito highlighted the increasing flow of cocaine from Colombia through Ecuador, reviewed Embassy programs to address the increase, and identified &next steps& to improve interdiction. Cocaine seizures in Ecuador and on vessels originating in Ecuador have increased exponentially in the past two years. Embassy Quito is working closely with police, military and judicial contacts to address the increased flow. Additional measures, especially in the coastal and maritime arena, will strengthen interdiction capabilities. End Summary.

Shift in Trafficking Patterns Puts Ecuador in the Spotlight

¶2. (C) Presenters from various agencies at a September 21 ONDCP-sponsored conference in Quito provided information indicating that Colombian narco-traffickers are responding to increased Andean Counternarcotics Initiative pressure on their traditional northern routes by increasing cocaine shipments through Ecuador. Shipments are originating from points all along the Ecuador coast, with traffickers using large, well-coordinated flotillas of support and diversion boats to move their product north. As U.S. interdictions have increased, the mother ships and their support networks are pushing farther south and west to avoid detection.

¶3. (U) The increased maritime trafficking through Ecuador is reflected in the exponential increase in seizures of Ecuador-originating shipments in the last two years. From CY 2004 to 2005, seizures jumped from approximately 4 metric tons to approximately 43 metric tons. This trend has continued in CY 2006, with seizures already reaching 26 metric tons in September; far ahead of last year's pace. It is clear that Colombian narco-traffickers see Ecuador as a viable alternative to their traditional routes and are attempting to exploit it.

Overview of Embassy Programs

¶4. (U) Ambassador Jewell provided an overview to the conference of Embassy Quito's counter narcotics activities. She described the close coordination at post among DEA, NAS,

USAID, DAO, Milgroup and other offices and their counterparts to identify, interdict, and prosecute drug traffickers. The Ambassador highlighted the importance of the northern border with Colombia, detailing how the Embassy interagency team supports military and police efforts to counter FARC presence and to interdict movement of cocaine and precursors in the border region. The military, in addition to some interdiction activities of its own, provides force protection to the vetted counter-narcotics police units which the Embassy is funding along the northern border. A large percentage of the Embassy's overall CN budget goes to the support of these Ecuadorian military forces, mainly Army, which are necessary to effectively respond to CN activities in the area. The Ambassador also outlined complementary mission efforts to promote economic and social development in border communities to reduce dependency on drug related activities. (See REFTEL for an update on recent Embassy activities on the northern border.)

¶5. (C) The Ambassador also provided an overview of the Embassy's CN activities away from the northern border including vetted mobile counter-narcotics police units and canine &drug-sniffer8 units at key locations throughout the country. The mobile teams conduct unannounced road inspections throughout the country, while the canine teams focus on airports, seaports, truck stops and postal facilities. Both of these units work closely with special intelligence units, also funded by the Embassy, which provide specific information on suspected shipments. Regarding the maritime border, Ambassador Jewell described efforts by the Embassy team to improve port security through better cooperation between port administrators, the police and customs officials.

¶6. (U) Finally, Ambassador Jewell mentioned the work USAID and NAS are doing with law enforcement and judicial contacts to streamline the prosecution of counter narcotics cases. Ecuador is transitioning from an inquisitorial to an accusatorial legal system, and USAID and NAS are providing assistance to speed this transition and to ensure that the criminal justice process can efficiently handle counter narcotics cases. The Ambassador noted that there is a backlog of cases, and a resulting backlog of seized properties, that urgently needs to be addressed.

Political Setting and the Way Forward

¶7. (C) Ambassador Jewell told the conference that while the country team is experiencing very good CN cooperation with virtually all its key GoE counterparts, especially in the police and military, there is widespread misunderstanding and little public support for the ACI. Knee-jerk fears of being "dragged into Plan Colombia" makes overt support for ACI goals almost certain political suicide for any aspiring office holders in the current environment in Ecuador. That said, the Ambassador continued, our Ecuadorian counterparts recognize the seriousness of the increased flow of cocaine through Ecuador and are willing to act on it, albeit quietly. On a positive note, news reports of the maritime seizures have been favorably received by the public.

¶8. (C) As an example of what works in this political environment, the Ambassador cited the maritime boarding procedures that the Embassy recently negotiated with the Ecuadorian Navy. The procedures, signed with deliberately minimal fanfare, standardize the process for U.S. Coast Guard and Navy boarding of Ecuadorian flagged vessels (which has resulted in several significant seizures.) The Ambassador cautioned that as the ONDCP conference considered next steps in Ecuador it should try to identify discrete activities that can be implemented with elements of the executive branch and military rather than initiatives that would require Congressional approval or draw public debate, as the latter would almost certainly make implementation more difficult. She also cautioned that if the current front-runner in the Presidential race, radical leftist Rafael Correa, wins this fall the need for careful management of CN initiatives in

Ecuador will be even greater.

¶19. (C) The Ambassador said she looked forward to hearing possible next steps for Ecuador from the conference. She reminded participants, however, that CN funding for Ecuador has declined significantly over the past two years and that an effective gameplan requires either more resources or a realistically limited focus to succeed.

Next Steps) Beefing Up Maritime Enforcement

¶10. (C) Looking to the future and how best to address the increasing flow of cocaine through Ecuador, conference participants agreed that maritime interdictions have been the most effective single activity over the past two years. The discussion turned to how best to improve on these successes. Recommendations fell into three main categories: improving control over port activities; improving interdiction procedures; and improving intelligence on shipments.

¶11. (C) Embassy representatives provided information on the status of port security and CN monitoring at the large ports () Manta, Guayaquil and Esmeraldas) and other smaller access points along the coast. While it is clear that vulnerabilities exist in the area of containerized shipping, there was not enough information available to assess the extent to which they are being exploited by traffickers. Improving controls over containerized shipping would include low cost options such as improving coordination among port authorities, police, and customs officials (already underway) and higher-end options such as the use of gamma-ray scanners.

¶12. (C) The discussion turned to improving controls over non-commercial fishing boats, which have been the primary known method of transportation used by traffickers over the past two years. Embassy representatives pointed out that in Manta, for instance, there are approximately 100 of these vessels at anchor at any time. The GoE Coast Guard does not have the resources to conduct in-port boardings of these vessels. Providing the small boats, ion-scanners, and search equipment to enable the GoE Coast Guard to make these boardings would greatly enhance controls in this area.

¶13. (C) Once these boats are at sea, coordination between JIATF-South, the Embassy and the GoE becomes critical to successful interdictions. Although the GoE maintains that its national boundary extends 200 miles from shore, including from the Galapagos Islands, the Embassy has been successful in establishing boarding procedures for vessels within these boundaries. Embassy representatives noted that boarding requests that used to take one or two days to be approved, or were never approved, are now normally processed by the GoE within a matter of hours. Also, while the GoE does not allow extradition of its own citizens for prosecution in other countries, it has been allowing the transportation to the U.S. of non-Ecuadorians captured during maritime interdictions.

¶14. (C) The consensus at the conference was to continue exercising the newly established boarding procedures to &routinize8 them with GoE officials. In addition, JIATF-South agreed to the concept of vetted GoE ship riders in order to more expeditiously handle boardings, especially within the 200 mile zone. To further facilitate communications and coordination with the GoE, JIATF-South will explore the possibility of adding a second GoE liaison position, preferably Navy, to its command. Finally, the Embassy will work with its counterparts to pave the way for the use of gas spiking of fuel found on logistic support vessels.

¶15. (C) The third key area for improving maritime interdiction was increased coordination of intelligence. All participants agreed that good intelligence had been the key to the dramatic increase in seizures of shipments through Ecuador. One of the keys to success in this area has been

the ability to prosecute non-Ecuadorians captured at sea in the U.S., while another has been improved analysis of information from sources outside of Ecuador related to shipments through Ecuador. The general consensus was that most of the increased trafficking through Ecuador to date is Colombian traffickers moving their operations south. Thus, intelligence regarding these individuals and their operations generated outside of Ecuador is critical to interdiction of the drugs flowing through Ecuador. All participants agreed to increase coordination on this front.

Embassy Comment

¶16. (C) The ONDCP-sponsored conference was an excellent opportunity to highlight for key offices involved in ACI the fact that Colombian traffickers have shifted a large portion of their activities to Ecuador. It also provided an opportunity to highlight and discuss the Embassy's CN programs, our recent successes in working with GoE counterparts, and the political realities here as they relate to our CN agenda.

¶17. (C) The Embassy strongly supports the conference's recommended focus on tightening controls over the maritime border and increasing interdictions at sea. We are already in the process of shifting some resources from military support on the northern border to support for maritime forces, and we will coordinate pending action items with JIATF-South and other offices. At the same time, we will continue to maintain attention to CN activities along the northern border, further develop CN police capabilities, and streamline prosecution of CN cases. As several conference participants noted, the increased flow through Ecuador is a direct result of ACI successes in Colombia and northern shipping routes; it is now essential that we cutoff this attempt to move operations to Ecuador before they gain a solid footing. End Comment.

JEWELL